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## THE PREDICTION OF HUMAN CONDUCT: A STUDY IN BERGSON.\*

B. BOSANQUET.

1. The root of Bergson's views lies in his idea of 'duration' as contrasted with that of mathematical time or time spatially symbolized, or taken as the measure of change in inorganic nature.

The mathematician's time, as I understand the contrast which Bergson draws, is symbolized by the uniform movement of a point, and his time-units are the imaginary successive positions of such a point, which he speaks of as  $T_1$   $T_2$   $T_3$ . Their meaning, as the mathematician employs them, is that a certain configuration of physical points coincides with each of these supposed positions of the uniformly moving point. Their meaning, therefore, has no reference at all to the intervals traversed by the imaginary point. They mark a number of simultaneities, or correspondences, between positions of different points and the position of the uniformly moving point.

As a proof of this it is pointed out (what the present writer has drawn attention to in combating the idea of absolute time), that if we suppose all physical move-

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\* An address delivered at University College, Cardiff. This was an attempt to make clear Bergson's position on certain questions to a general audience. It may be of interest to general readers; and it indicates an attitude to his views which I believe to be the right one.

ments to halve or to double their actual velocity, the change would not affect any mathematical formula, so long as the ratios of all the units to each other were preserved. The series of positions would run past faster or slower, but it would be no less complete, and there would be nothing to indicate the change of absolute velocity.

Time, thus conceived, is not cumulative. It carries along with it nothing of the past. If a configuration recurs, it is as if it were a new thing. The fact that it is a recurrence in no way affects the points composing it. Hence, a previous position can be identically repeated; for repetition awakens nothing of the past, and thus makes no difference. In a word, such a conception of time excludes the notion of history. Nothing is gained or carried forward. In the intervals between the positions, the system might as well not be.

Duration proper, on the other hand, is one with life, or rather, with living. Its successive parts are essentially not homogeneous nor uniform; it is the experience of a being radically progressive and creative, whose states or acts are not outside one another, but carry their past with them. This is why the experience is essentially creative, productive of novelty. It is always gaining, by the addition of the new to an old which is retained. For such an experience, as opposed to mathematical time as above described, the *intervals* are the reality. It is what it is, by living through them; growing and changing, gaining in every moment. Hence in this case no true repetition is possible. But there is a history, and the movement is irreversible. No prior state can be truly repeated. The fact of its being 'repeated' would be enough to make it different, because its prior occurrence, and what has come between, have *ex hypothesi* left their mark.

Now Bergson makes his general complaint against both philosophy and common sense, that we confuse true and false duration; we confuse life with the uniform

movement of a point; in a word, we confuse time with space.

For all our common wants and common sense are profoundly falsified by space perception and the analogy of space. Language, practical social needs, current natural science, are all of them deformed by spatial distinctions,—*e. g.*, by the distinction of things, objects in space, which is rooted in practice and governs language. Concepts of things and events are all practical and spatial (it is almost the same) at root. They provide us with a scheme of *what is where*, and *what happens when*. This is all we want to know,—when or where we must act to be dealing with the due situation or configuration. The coincidence of an act with the relevant state of facts is what matters to us. The interval is as unimportant to our common sense as to the mathematician. Our intelligence is at home in geometry and mechanism, in repetitions of occurrences according to law. Its motto is ‘Same produces same,’ ‘Same cause produces same effect.’ In face of genuine life, genuine duration, it is bewildered. True, we can make to ourselves a picture, as we imagine, of history and continuous occurrence. But (it is a constant and characteristic simile in Bergson) our picture of duration is only a cinematograph picture. We snapshot in our minds a number of successive positions of occurrences; and by running them rapidly past our mental vision, we produce or reproduce what seems to be an experience of duration,—of continuous living, of uninterrupted time. But the thing is an illusion, like the bioscopic picture itself. We have not, in gathering these images, recorded the experience of the lapse of living. Our images mark the ends of short intervals; and they give us no record, represent no intimate apprehension, of the intervals themselves.

So it is our tendency in all our current reflection to confound duration with so-called uniform time. But this time is really space, *i. e.*, succession symbolized by the uniform movement of a point. We think of ourselves

as being in time, just as we think of a thing's being in time, *i. e.*, as passing through a succession of events. Our very self is disguised by superficial connections as in hypnotic suggestion, or association of an idea with an act. And thus we actually fail to enter into our own true duration. We are called in the morning and get up; we have made it a routine connection, almost of the type of 'pull the trigger and the gun goes off.' The perception releases the action.

2. Hence Bergson's criticism of determinism and indeterminism alike. Both, he urges, are rooted in the spatial symbolism of time. We state, as the crucial question, "Could I have done otherwise than I did?" In stating the question thus, we substitute for the experience of duration the picture of a hypothetical point traversing a uniform line, and, *ex hypothesi*, to an end which we already know. Then, in order to express the fact of choice, we are driven to imagine the moving point confronted by a bifurcation of the line; one way leading to X, the other to Y, and the moving point as oscillating between them, before it takes one of the two alternative routes.

All this means that we have split up the living self, which has all sorts of tendencies within it, by which it grows and develops its action,—we have split this up into an indifferent point and two tracks lying outside it, such as can be retraversed in our quasi-mathematical thought. This is really a gratuitous imagery. The developing consciousness, holding together within itself varying inclinations, and developing by their means into something new at every moment, is altogether a different thing. So, however common sense states the question of freedom, it naturally represents it in sharp verbal or spatial distinctions. Could I have done otherwise than I did? Could the point, which has gone to X, have gone to Y instead?

This statement of the question, Bergson urges, however you answer it, in the end gives up the game to the

determinist. You have split up the conscious life into lines and points in space; and if you take account of the knowledge which *ex hypothesi* you possess, you are driven to admit that the point was moving, all along, to X or to Y, and therefore was not an indifferent point. The indeterminist may assert, "You could have done otherwise; at the place of bifurcation, it was still open to the moving point to travel to Y, instead of traveling as it did, to X." But that is wilfully using only a part of his knowledge, which tells him what you really did, *i. e.*, that you did the action X, and therefore, according to this mode of representation, were all along going to do the action X.

The fault which makes this result inevitable is representing time as space. Real time, or duration, is the growth of a being which contains the two lines,—the conflicting tendencies,—and much more besides, within itself; and it will develop at a certain stage into a certain action. But there is no indifferent point, no homogeneous line, and no ready-made alternative routes, lying there like roads on a map, or objects waiting for choice on a counter. You cannot think back in spatial terms and say, I, being what I was before and after, was there, as I might be again, between these two alternatives laid down for me. This all comes from mapping your course after the action, like a route laid down and existent in space. It in no way corresponds to the nature of an action. An action is not free because some other action 'could have been done,' or unfree because the other 'could not have been done.' It is free, if it is free at all, because of a certain character in itself, which is not present in all actions, and where present, is present in various degrees.

3. What is a free action? A free action is one which expresses the whole 'me.' That, of course, is not a new thing to say. If Bergson has a new point to make in saying it, this point lies in his hostility to our current self. For him, this is a sort of crust over our true or fundamental self, formed by language, common-place

education, traditional ideas, social practice and social relations. In all this, he sees the enemy, the influence of spatial distinction and the spatial symbol of time, as expressed in the external world of things and the connections of simultaneous events, and the connection of events with the conduct which follows on them by a mechanical routine or habit of reaction. All this he thinks of, to repeat the phrase, as a crust<sup>1</sup> formed over the true self which lies in immediate experiences, in feelings in the depths of personality. "To act without a reason is often the best reason." What does guide us when we are free is differently phrased as "the total of our sentiments," "our personal idea of happiness and honor." But, as a rule, Bergson is hostile to the term idea. He is inclined to identify it with all that he opposes to the true personality, with a superficial idea, a hypnotic or quasi-hypnotic suggestion,<sup>2</sup> which makes up a great part of what we mistake for ourselves. "Many people," Bergson says, "never do a free action at all," *i. e.*, they act from routine in which by association the occurrence releases the deed; they act out of purely formal and traditional conceptions of social duty. They never enter into themselves and ask themselves what they, as complete personalities, really want. "They never once possess their souls," as Matthew Arnold has it. They are dominated by associationist images, and their mind is fixed not on their spiritual growth, the life and development of their whole being, but so to speak, on what is to be done when

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<sup>1</sup> If I remember right, he does not refer to Wordsworth:

And custom lie upon thee with a weight  
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life.

<sup>2</sup> It will be remembered that for M. Tarde our consciousness of the social self as our own is of the nature of a hypnotic illusion. "Les lois de l'imitation," p. 83: "L'état social, comme l'état hypnotique, n'est qu'une forme du rêve, un rêve de commande et un rêve en action. N'avoir que des idées suggérées et les croire spontanées; telle est l'illusion propre au sonnambule, et aussi bien à l'homme social." The conception betrays a total failure to apprehend the nature of identity.

the hour strikes, and the half-hour, and the hour after that. They live not in the lapse of duration, but in the conjunctures of occurrence. This is, as I understand it, the connection between his disparagement of the superficial self, and his theory of the defective symbolization of duration by space.

4. Now we are prepared to consider Bergson's view of prediction in case of human conduct. From the above conception of duration flows a clear distinction between (1) prediction concerning purely natural events, *e. g.*, in astronomy, and (2) prediction in matters of human conduct.

In the former case you have only to deal with time units, as described above, which are in effect merely numbers, imaginary points in a uniform movement, and do not depend upon the intervals they divide. Prediction in this case only means, as it were, making them pass you very fast; reducing the intervals between them to almost nothing; doing the work of millenniums in a few minutes. This, as we saw above, makes no essential difference in the work to be done. All the occurrences occur without change; the time units are rattled off; only the intervals between them are shorter than those which occur in fact. In this case you can *do the thing before it occurs*, without affecting its nature. And this is everywhere the true essential of prediction. You can predict, where and in as far as you can do a thing before it happens or is done, and not elsewhere or otherwise.

In the life of conscious being the case is different. Here duration is a cause; the intervals are experienced in transitions of feeling; and to shorten one of them is to change the quality and outcome of its content. Shorten your day by one half, and you have cut out half the actual felt experience of it.

True, as appeared above, it is possible to run over past experiences very quickly in the memory; and hence it may seem that they undergo no alteration by a change



of the duration which they occupy. But the fact is not really so. To run them over in this way, it is essential to have named them; and by naming them they are essentially altered. They are made into concepts, extracts or essences, comparable to the things and events of common sense. Language is one of the great falsifiers; one of the great agents in the conspiracy to turn time duration into the spatial symbol of time. This distrust of language is remarkable, and from a philosophical point of view, ominous. However, it is the present point. Our experiences, thus recalled and reviewed, are no longer what they were in immediate experience, and would no longer suggest to us the results which in actual experience they would produce. Therefore, prediction being essentially to do a thing before it is done, you are in the case of human conduct shut up to two alternatives.

(Note at this point that Bergson makes a sharp distinction between probable prediction, based upon a man's past conduct, and absolute prediction, claiming to rest upon calculation. We shall see that this distinction coincides with one drawn long ago by Mr. Bradley in "Ethical Studies" (1876). Bergson appears to make too little of the type of prediction which he admits, when he denies that it is a true link between past and future.)

The case is, you, A, are to predict the course of action of B absolutely and by strict calculation or deduction from detailed data, not by mere analogy to conduct in previous circumstances. Then there are two sub-cases. You, A, may have the factors of B's duration (sentiments, motives, impulses) present in your mind symbolically, *i. e.*, through language and in the medium of knowledge. Then, as we have seen to be Bergson's view, the factors are not in A's mind what they are or will be or have been in B's mind. You cannot indicate their several intensities and their consequent result and bearing within the personal life, unless you know the total course of life within which they are to behave as factors. And this would be to know precisely what you are challenged to predict.

You can have these factors in your mind, that of A, beforehand by way of knowledge and communication through language; but then you do not possess them in their aspect of forces and portions of a life. They are stripped of the power to grow and combine and produce the result which, in their true duration, they would produce. A cannot, in this way, do B's action before it is done. Granting that he can intellectually possess the data, they will not, for him, live the life which belongs to them.<sup>3</sup>

Or again, you, A, may possess the factors, actually, as they are, experiencing their value and intensity and power, and not merely possessing these data in an intellectual shape. But then it would inevitably follow that your, A's, 'duration' would be one and the same with that of the person B whose future action is to be predicted. And that means that you are one and the same with him; for any deviation, a different body, a different date or life-history, would destroy some of the living experience necessary to the result. Therefore you fail in one of the conditions of prediction. You, A, would be doing B's act, but you would not be doing it beforehand. You would have turned into B, and be doing the act when and as B actually does it.

5. So, to sum up Bergson's view. By calculation, after the manner of astronomy, you can never predict a course of consciousness. For a course of consciousness can never be possessed apart from its own duration. You can predict, of course, probably, from knowledge of individual character and its expression in analogous situations. But that is not the kind of prediction in question. You cannot predict demonstratively from previous knowledge of psychical factors, because they have not their full nature

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<sup>3</sup> Mr. Bradley, in stating the alternative of prediction by calculation, requires it to be from data such as can exist before the birth of B. Bergson apparently admits rather more, in suggesting that the actual factors of B's mind should be present as data to A.

except in being experienced. And you cannot take refuge in applying the idea of causation to the psychical nexus. Causation has no meaning in conscious duration, because repetition is there impossible, for the reason pointed out above; and *the principle of causation 'Same produces same' only applies where true or precise repetition can take place, i. e., only in mathematical time, but not in duration. For in duration there can never be any recurrence of the same.*

Freedom then is the relation of the concrete 'me' to its action. This relation is indefinable; because, if fixed in a conception, and analyzed, it drops out the nature of creative novelty which belongs to true duration, and you find yourself handling the spatial chart of time, and not the living experience. Thus every definition of freedom must establish determinism; and yet determinism is false.

6. The above view, as I observed, coincides in certain points with that of Mr. Bradley's "Ethical Studies." Calculation of a man's conduct from pre-natal data, it is there observed, if possible, would be objectionable in the highest degree to the plain man. Whereas prediction based on experience of an individually formed character, as displayed in his habitual action, is an everyday fact, and is not objectionable, but on the whole acceptable, to the plain man. And, in general agreement with Bergson, it is there pointed out that the instinctive objection of a reasonable man is not against foreknowledge, but against what I may summarize as 'reduction.' What a man minds, is being treated as something different from what he feels himself to be; as something that can be mastered from the outside and put together out of alien data or factors; out of circumstances and conditions disparate with himself. He does not dislike being known and understood as he really is, or at least as the sort of being he takes himself to be. What he dislikes is a process of understanding which seems to imply that he is not in the least the sort of being he takes himself to be. So far

Bergson's views have a great deal in common with the best idealism.

But his opposition seems to be limited, so far as English philosophy is concerned, to such writers as Bain and Mill. And he therefore appears not to meet the contentions of idealism in their developed form. Idealism would, I imagine, accompany him in his campaign against associationism, but would make other demands as against his own anti-intellectualism.

Here are some points by which such a criticism might be illustrated.

(1) The principle of intelligence is not bare identity, as Bergson throughout maintains. Causation, as the principle of science, is not dependent on mere repetition of conditions. Therefore this alleged distinction<sup>4</sup> between life and inorganic nature,—that causation is a principle which can apply to the latter and not to the former, ceases to be tenable. Everywhere, intelligence lies in the tracking of the universal, which is continuity through difference, essentially creative, and not dependent on unchanged recurrence. On the contrary, such recurrence is essentially destructive of intelligent comprehension, by leaving nothing for it to comprehend. Bergson, as it seems to me, is not really disposed to accept the extreme mathematical theory of homogeneous units of matter, but employs it as a *reductio ad absurdum*, by making it typical of the operations of intelligence and the principle of causation. But, as described by him and by other critics, it is not identical with either; and you cannot at once apply it as a *reductio ad absurdum*, and assign it as the true principle of investigation in the inorganic world. In short, the distinction between true duration and the spatial symbolism of time,—which may be a working abstraction,—is one thing. But the suggestion that the latter gives the true characteristic of actual

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<sup>4</sup> It is a distinction which Hegel maintains up to a certain point, but not absolutely.

inorganic nature, and that it is adequate to the operation of intelligence and the nexus of causation, is altogether another thing.

(2) We find the same bias in the disparagement of thought, language, ideals, social relations. The general conception is that articulateness involves falsity. "Reality is richer than thought." Life, feeling, personality, become unknowable things in themselves. We are watching the rise of a new agnosticism, which necessarily develops into a new pessimism. It is always pessimism which tells you that ideas, language, social relations, take you away from the depths of reality and from the springs of life and feeling.

(3) To this point of view belongs the neglect of the conception that psychical sequence and the genesis of actions may be knowable as logically determined, though not, or not merely, a case of causation. We know that logic is latent in the most casual association, and this fact might give us a clue by which logical determination might be regarded as the true mode of initiative where free causes<sup>5</sup> are at work. Thus much might be known and understood about the action of human beings without, or in addition to, prediction by calculation. Reduction might be avoided, but so also might the agnosticism of personality, into which the modern movement is falling as the opposite extreme.

If the three points just referred to were rectified, what is valuable in Bergson's attitude might be retained, while the agnosticism would go. Freedom of action might be held a logical mode of initiative, though not in the common sense a causal one. This would give a much better prospect of reconciliation with a causal system of nature, and with the whole of individuality, which is mutilated by the agnosticism we have described.

For example: Bergson rightly complains of the bad

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<sup>5</sup> It is noticeable that the term 'free cause' is common to Bergson and to Green.

habit of taking very trivial choices as the tests of freedom; mere cases of routine where the whole personality does not 'vibrate.' He likes to think of the typical choice as what happens when an appeal is made to your whole passionate nature, and it rises up and defies tradition and you do something worth calling new. Now I am disposed to turn the same objection in another way. It has always seemed to me that the really typical choices, those which show human freedom and the true nature of initiative at their fullest, are the great logical choices which occupy years in the making, as when a man chooses his religion, or his profession, or his political party, working by long processes of suggestion and elimination, till he has found, or nearly found, a self-expression which includes the whole of him, and in which therefore he can rest. Well, but, it may be said, this is to make the typical choice nothing less than the whole process of experience which constitutes a man's life. So it is, no doubt, and so, I hold, it ought to be. If the free act is the act which expresses the whole self, it is here if anywhere that you get it. I certainly agree that you do not get it in the trivial choice,—am I or am I not free to blow out this candle?—but neither, I think, do you get it at all completely in moments of rebellion against tradition and of upheaval of the whole passionate nature. You get it most fully, and see the working of it most plainly, when the self has time and opportunity to search for and to find the expression that is really appropriate to it. And it is in as far as referred to such a process, and as stages in it, that momentary choices have their freedom.

When we take such a point of view, and return to the conception that ideas have hands and feet, and get rid of the agnosticism of personality, we are able to draw a deeper result from the discussion of foreknowledge, while adhering to Bergson's and Mr. Bradley's main results. Let us recall Bergson's own main principles in dealing with prediction. Prediction means doing a thing

before it is done.<sup>6</sup> And you can do this for conscious beings as far as, but only as far as, you are the same with them. Now if we abandon agnosticism, acknowledge identity as something other than tautology, and accept ideas as the fullest form of finite experience, a good deal follows from this.

Both the world, and intelligence, we should be able to say, are in principle one. It is possible in various degrees for individuals to contain others, and to be identical with them. This is illustrated in the history of inventions, which so constantly shows independent lives working out to the same conclusion at the same time; or in the logic of practice applied to the great problems of statesmanship, when an earlier mind will lay down the lines on which all subsequent minds must and will proceed for, say, a century to come. Or more generally, in the relation of great thinkers to those who come after them, or in common life of men who have great capacity, to those whose performances are wholly covered by theirs. Or ultimately, in so far as we can conceive the relation of the individual to God in religion as one of identity and inclusion, the supposed difficulty of foreknowledge falls away.

It may be said that this sort of inclusion or covering, as when a minor philosopher moves wholly within the orbit of a greater thinker, is not the 'prediction' which forms the difficulty. It does not tell us whether or whom a man will marry or how long he will live, or what he will die of. I leave these two latter instances, although they are not in point, because the fact that they occur to one so naturally is in itself significant. They are not matters of conduct but of natural causation, and therefore they do not illustrate the prediction of conduct. They do not. But are they not just typical of the incidents which most readily spring to mind when we pronounce prediction im-

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<sup>6</sup> This would hardly apply to irrational prediction if such a thing were possible. See Mr. Bradley's interesting remarks in "Ethical Studies," p. 17.

possible? Is not the obvious suggestion, when we review our attitude to such incidents, that lines of conduct are capable of being known and entered into from without in proportion to their magnitude and importance, and that it is really the physical and the comparatively trivial which we cannot enter into by way of knowledge or foreknowledge? If a statesman is going to take the Secretaryship for India, it may well be possible for some persons to foresee what line of policy he will adopt, and surely this is a more important point, entering deeper into his personality, than even the question whether or whom he will marry, not to say, what he will die of.

And this is not merely the case, admitted above, of probable prediction from character. It is a form of knowledge depending on the profound study of a difficult problem, and involving the identity which intelligence,—being in principle one,—is capable of developing in what are called different minds. There is no doubt, in principle, that one mind can include another, or share its content with another, though, of course, with finite minds, the inclusion or participation cannot extend to every detail.

I conclude then by repeating: the important principle is that not foreknowledge, but reduction is the impossible and objectionable thing. You can predict for others in as far as you are the same with them. And, contrary to Bergson's agnosticism, we can be and are the same with others in a considerable degree.

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## THE IDEALISM OF RUDOLPH EUCKEN.

S. H. MELLONE.

**I**DEALISM is a word of many meanings. In its most essential and general significance we take it to stand for the conviction that the universe is the work or embodiment of reason, mind, or spirit.

A century ago, when Napoleon was shaking the political